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## EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND DIGITAL SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE SELECTED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

By

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### Abstract

*Entrepreneurial and Digital Skills are two distinct but complementary tools for driving and sustaining youth empowerment for economic development of any nation. The study took a cursory look at how these two concepts can be used to empower youth for meaningful contributions towards the development of a nation. The study was carried out among students of some selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Three hundred respondents were selected in the three geopolitical zones of the State. They are: Ogun East, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu Ode; Ogun Central, Federal College of Education, Abeokuta and Ogun West, The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro. Three research questions and one hypothesis were posed throughout the study's execution, from which the data collection questionnaire was created. Using a straightforward random sample procedure, 300 respondents were chosen. Additionally, two hundred and seventy-five (275) of the three hundred copies of the questionnaire that were created and sent to the respondents were properly completed and returned. Descriptive and inferential analysis utilizing linear regression at the 0.05 level of significance were used to examine the data. The study found that digital skills and entrepreneurship can empower youth for any country's sustained economic development. It was recommended that management of tertiary institution should focus more on training that involves entrepreneurship and digital skills. This will help equip young people with the skills they needed to succeed in the digital economy and become self-reliant.*

**Keywords:** Digital Skills, Empowerment, Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Economic Development and Tertiary Institution

## Introduction

Empowering youth through entrepreneurship and digital skills is crucial for sustainable economic development, as it fosters innovation, job creation, and economic growth. It also promotes self-reliance and social inclusion. Entrepreneurship creates new businesses, leading to job creation and increased economic activity. The rising unemployment rate, poverty, and overall poor state of the Nigerian economy are major concerns for the government (Garba, 2010). In order to produce wealth, create jobs, and end poverty, Nigeria's "National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)" aims to establish an economy in which major indigenous firms engage in industrial, merchandising, financial, and servicing activities.

Nigeria's three main national issues are poverty, unemployment, and corruption (Akpan, 2011). Nigeria was ranked 48th in the world based on its nominal GDP of \$115 billion in 2008. With a GDP per capita income of \$1,213, Nigeria is ranked 165th in the world and 33rd out of 44 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, despite being the continent's largest. According to estimates from the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS), over 70% of Nigerians are impoverished (Okoli & Okoli, 2013).

Unemployment is a major problem in Nigeria (Akpan, 2011). Before 2005, tertiary institutions in Nigeria produced thousands of graduates with little or prospects of securing employment (Garba, 2010). Many of these graduates lacked the technical, cognitive and attitudinal skills necessary to meet the demands of the labour market. That was why in 2006, the Federal Government of Nigeria announced the introduction of entrepreneurship education as a compulsory course of study for students in all tertiary institutions irrespective of their specializations (Okoli & Okoli 2013). The implementation however, took effect in the 2007/2008 academic session.

To ensure the effective implementation of entrepreneurship education, most tertiary institutions have established Coordinating Centres for entrepreneurship education to support and enhance students' training. These entrepreneurship centers train students on fisheries, bricklaying, cateren services, soap making, bead making, phone repairs, hairdresser, fashion designers. When graduates engage in these entrepreneurial activities, they can make a significant contribution to economic diversification and growth, particularly within the framework of the Vision 2030 initiative, which seeks to reduce reliance on oil (Akinwale et al. (2020). Entrepreneurship can reduce poverty and inequality by providing opportunities for economic advancement.

Digital Skill which is an integral part of Technology has changed the way business processes are carried out (Adeyemi & Kehinde, 2024). Over the past decade, organizations have increasingly digitized their operations and processes. Today, many businesses leverage artificial intelligence (AI) to streamline workflows, enhance automation, and deliver personalized experiences at scale. Consequently, modern job seekers need specialized skills to differentiate themselves in a competitive job market. Therefore, for sustainable economic development of a nation, it is important that youths are equipped with digital skills during their training programmes. Digital skills encompass the ability to confidently and effectively use technology, including devices, software, and online platforms, for information access, communication, creation, and problem-solving (UNDP Podgorica, 2022). Entrepreneurs introduce innovative products, services, and technologies, boosting productivity and competitiveness.

According to Oviawe & Anavberokha (2008), Nigeria will undergo technological, economic, industrial, and sociopolitical transformation if graduates are effectively utilized through entrepreneurship and digital skills. The implementation of digital skills in higher education can also have an impact on the educational system in two ways: first, by creating a need for students to acquire digital skills at the basic and intermediate levels, and second, by equipping recent graduates who have received training in higher education with digital competencies (World Bank Group, 2021).

The purpose of digital skills is to assist TVET graduates and higher education students in Africa in creating operational institution-level plans. While most TVET institutions lack complete Digital Skills policies or plans, many higher education institutions have ICT strategies that are either still in the draft stage or are not updated on a regular basis and are typically not implemented at scale. It is important that institutions put in place digital skills policies and strategies that will help the sustainability of entrepreneurship. A graduate who is digitally skilled can start up entrepreneurship businesses such as, content creation, blogging, business center, software developer amongst others. This would eventually lead to economic development.

The need to achieve balance between the economic growth and social equity and environmental stewardship has increasingly become the center of global policy discussion by putting sustainable economic development into the focus. This broad methodism acknowledges that long term prosperity is not only dependent on economic performance but also social incorporation and ecological sustainability. The strategic goal of entrepreneurship education that is, to provide graduates of international standard with the latest knowledge and digital skills that are highly employable in the job

market and also able to work independently, should be maintained in order to sustain the economic development of a country (Atakpa, 2011). Entrepreneurship has also been critical as far as stimulating economic growth in rural and less developed regions is concerned. In this regard, the current paper investigated how empowering the youth by entrepreneurship and digital skills affects sustainable economic growth within selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The drive to empower youth through entrepreneurship and digital skills for sustainable development is largely motivated by the high unemployment rate among graduates. Each year, higher education institutions across the country produce thousands of graduates who enter a labor market that lacks sufficient employment opportunities. There is no gainsaying that majority of Nigerian Graduates do not have the required skills to meet up with the demand of the technological market. Organizations now rely heavily on technology and anyone one who wants to remain relevant in the technological market must be equipped with digital skills as a lot of business processes and procedures are carried out using technology. Also, lack of entrepreneurial skill that could make Nigerian graduates to be self-reliant is another challenge which leads to unemployment. Hence, the need for entrepreneurial development and digital skills that will enable youth start up something on their own. This study examined the influence of empowering youth through entrepreneurship and Digital Skills for sustainable economic development.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of the study was to investigate the influence of empowering youth through Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills for sustainable economic development. The specific objectives are:

1. To identify the entrepreneurial and digital skills needed by students of the selected tertiary institutions for sustainable economic development in Ogun State
2. To identify the entrepreneurial skills available for sustainable economic development by the students of the selected tertiary institution in Ogun State
3. To examine the digital skills available for sustainable economic development by students of the selected tertiary institution in Ogun State.
4. To examine the combined influence of entrepreneurial and digital skills on sustainable economic development of students after graduation

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the entrepreneurship and digital skills needed by the students of the selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State?
2. What are the entrepreneurial skills available for sustainable economic development by students of the selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State
3. What are the Digital skills available for sustainable economic development by students of the selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

### **Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis was formulated and tested on this study

H01 Entrepreneurship and digital skill do not have significant influence on sustainable economic development

### **Methodology**

This study was a survey of final year students in the three tertiary institutions selected for this study. The Institutions were selected from the three geopolitical zones of Ogun State, Nigeria. They are; The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro (representing Ogun West), Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun (representing Ogun East) and Federal College of Education, Abeokuta (representing Ogun Central). The population of the study comprised of all final years students in these institutions. Simple Random sampling technique was used to select three hundred students (300) It is to

be pointed out that one hundred students were selected from each of the Institutions used for this study. Also, a Structured Questionnaire consisting of thirty-one (31) items with 4point likert options was used as the instrument of data collection. Objectives one shows the Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills needed for sustainable economic development. Objectives two discusses the Entrepreneurship Opportunities available to students of the selected tertiary institutions for sustainable economic development. Objective three shows the Digital skills available to students of the selected tertiary institutions for sustainable economic development. Respondents were presented with four options and asked to select one using a four-point Likert scale: "Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1)". A total of three hundred (300) questionnaires were distributed, of which two hundred and seventy-five (275) were properly completed, retrieved, and used for data analysis. The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods, with hypotheses tested at a 0.05 level of significance, corresponding to a 95% confidence level.

## **Findings**

Table 1: Entrepreneurial and digital skills needed for sustainable economic development

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Leadership Skill	275	1	4	3.19	.696
Communication Skill	275	1	4	3.17	.679
Problem Solving Skill	275	1	4	3.09	.749
Financial acumen	275	1	4	3.12	.807
Networking Skill	275	1	4	3.20	.667
Adaptability and Resilience Skill	275	1	4	3.24	.693
Time Management Skill	275	1	4	3.13	.778
Risk Management	275	1	4	3.11	.830
Valid N (listwise)	275				
Field survey 2025					

Table 1 above shows the entrepreneurship skills needed for sustainable economic development by the students of the selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State. These skills are Leadership skill, communication skill, problem solving skills, financial acumen, business solving skills, networking skill, adaptability and resilience, time management, risk management. This can be seen from the mean scores of 3.19, 3.17, 3.09, 3.12, 3.20, 3.24, 3.13, and 3.11.

**Table 2: Entrepreneurship Opportunities available to students of the selected tertiary institutions for sustainable economic development in Ogun State, Nigeria**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Media Management	275	1	4	3.20	.696
Content Creation	275	1	4	3.18	.705
Fashion Design	275	1	4	3.09	.745
Graphic Design	275	1	4	3.16	.712
Handmade Craft	275	1	4	3.31	.713
Shoe Making	275	1	4	3.16	.691
Bead Making	275	1	4	3.31	1.982
Soap making	275	1	4	3.17	.672
Electronic repairs	275	1	4	3.19	.749

Bag making	275	1	4	3.09	.734
Computer repair	275	1	4	3.27	.739
Tie and Dye	275	1	4	3.16	.741
Phone repairs	275	1	4	3.11	.693
Canteen Services	275	1	4	3.12	.724
Brick/block making	275	1	4	3.24	.714
Valid N (listwise)	275				

Field survey 2025

Table 2 above shows the respondents agreed that the entrepreneurship opportunities available to students of the selected tertiary institution in Ogun State are social media management, content creation, fashion design graphic design handmade craft, shoe making bead making electronic repairs bag making computer repair, tie and dye, phone repairs, canteen services and brick/block making. This can be seen from there mean scores of 3.20, 3.18, 3.09, 3.16 , 3.31, 3.17, 3.19, 3.09, 3.27, 3.16, 3.11, 3.12 and 3.24.

**Table 3: Digital skills available to students of the selected tertiary institutions for sustainable economic development**

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Networking Skill	275	1	4	3.20	.667
Communication and collaboration Skill	275	1	4	3.17	.731
Media Literacy Skill	275	1	4	3.16	.727
Creativity Skill	275	1	4	3.22	.724
Data Analytics Skill	275	1	4	3.06	.639
Content making Skill	275	1	4	3.28	.653
Problem solving skill	275	1	4	3.09	.875
Valid N (listwise)	275				

Field survey 2025

Table 3 above shows the digital skills available for sustainable economic development by students of the selected tertiary institution in Ogun State. These digital skills are networking skill, Communication and collaboration Skill, media literacy skill, creativity skill, Data Analytics Skill, Content making and Problem solving skill. This can be seen from there mean score of 3.20 , 3.17, 3.16, 3.22, 3.06, 3.28, 3.09

#### **Hypothesis testing**

$H_0^1$  Entrepreneurship and digital skills do not have significant influence on sustainable economic development by the students of tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Table 4  
Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.554	.169		9.211	.000
Entrepreneurship	&				
Digital					
Skill	.505	.052	.510	9.798	.000

R = 0.510; R<sup>2</sup> = 0.260; Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.257; F-statistics (with 1, 273 df) = 98.004; p-value = 0.0000

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Development

Table 4 present the results of the hypothesis test, which posited that entrepreneurship and digital skills have no significant influence on sustainable economic development among students of tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. The findings reveal a weak but positively significant influence of entrepreneurship and digital skills on sustainable economic development. The adjusted R Square (R<sup>2</sup>) indicates that approximately 25% of the variance in sustainable development can be explained by perceptions of entrepreneurship and digital skills, reflecting a modest yet meaningful effect. Similarly, the analysis of variance shows that the regression model is statistically significant (p < .005) in explaining sustainable economic development. This demonstrates that entrepreneurship and digital skills contribute significantly to variations in sustainable economic development.

### Discussion of Findings

The result of table one shows the result of the entrepreneurial and digital skills needed for sustainable economic development by students of the selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State. These skills are Leadership skill, communication skill, and problem solving skills, financial acumen, and business solving skills, networking skill, adaptability and resilience, time management, risk management. The findings of this study relate with Branson (2010) study, that some of the skills needed by entrepreneurs include creative skill, problem solving skill and people factor's skills. These skills are needed to ensure the sustainability of the economy of any nation. Starting a business involves significant risk, requiring entrepreneurs to demonstrate determination and conviction to overcome initial challenges. Many startup businesses fail within the first few years due to a lack of essential skills. Therefore, a critical factor for success is the ability to learn from setbacks and persevere. Entrepreneurs must possess resilience, as numerous businesses collapse when owners lack the necessary skills to effectively manage and sustain their operations (Jimoh & Kehinde, 2022). Table two shows the entrepreneurship opportunities available to students of the selected tertiary institution in Ogun State. These entrepreneurship opportunities include social media management, content creation, fashion design, graphic design, handmade craft, shoe making, bead making, electronic repairs, bag making, computer repair, tie and dye, phone repairs, canteen services and brick/block making. The result of this finding supports the report of the study carried out by Okoli & Okoli (2013). The researchers in their study highlighted the skills that available to tertiary institution students. Some of them are production of soap and detergents, cosmetic, poultry, fish farming, website design and network marketing. Others are mobile phone repairs and maintenance. It is pertinent to state that workshops, seminars and training are organized for the students so that they can start up and run small scale business (self-employed) on their own after graduation. This will reduce poverty as entrepreneurship is a catalyst for sustainable economic development, capable of driving economic, social, and environmental progress in a balanced and synergistic manner (Ojeaga & Owolabi, 2011).

The result of table three shows digital skills available to students for sustainable economic development in the selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State. These digital skills are networking skill, Communication and collaboration Skill, media literacy skill, creativity skill, Data Analytics Skill, Content making and Problem solving skill. This result is in tandem with Koltay (2011) findings who in his study stated that Digital skill is the ability to find, communicate and collaborate, evaluate, use, share and create content, make data analytics using digital devices such as computers and smartphones. These skills enable users to make use of Information and Communication Technology tools to disseminate, communicate, store, access information. Mackey & Jacobson (2011) asserted that industries are increasingly using digital

technology to manage sales, store and analyze consumer data, and communicate important information. It is therefore important that in this technological age, entrepreneurs need to have digital skills. The growth of digital skills is illustrated by the fact that according to the World Economic Forum (WEF), 42 percent of tasks will be automated in 2027, as a result of using artificial intelligence (AI) and other technologies, and this is why the significance and value of digital skills are growing.

The findings of the hypothesis test, which accounted that the entrepreneurship and digital skills have no significant effect on the sustainable economic development, can be noticed as a weak with significant positive effect. The adjusted  $R^2$  indicates that the perceptions of sustainable development are partly explained by perceptions of entrepreneurship and digital skills, which is a small but significant effect. Equally, the analysis of variance indicates that the regression model is statistically significant ( $p < .005$ ), which proves that the entrepreneurship and digital skills play a significant role in creating variations in sustainable economic development.

This observation is consistent with the report by Elmonshid and Omer (2024), which also found that entrepreneurs are the engine of innovation, job creation, and exploration of technologies and business models that would resolve social and environmental issues and encourage economic dynamism. The impact of entrepreneurship on attaining sustainable development is also highlighted by the fact that through entrepreneurship, growth can be boosted, social development can be improved and environmental consequences reduced. As demonstrated by various studies, entrepreneurial activities and digital technologies can help the growth of the economy by creating jobs, enhancing productivity, and introducing innovation (Audretsch and Keilbach, 2004; Dhahri and Omri, 2018).

Overall, the paper proves that entrepreneurship and digital skills show weak and but positively relevant impact on sustainable economic development. The null hypothesis, to the effect that there is no significant relationship between entrepreneurship and digital skills and sustainable economic development, is, therefore, rejected

## **Conclusion**

Sustainable economic development is a multidimensional concept that aims to balance economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental stewardship. It is grounded in the principle of meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Achieving this balance requires harmonizing diverse and sometimes competing priorities, making sustainable development a complex undertaking for policymakers and practitioners. The economic pillar of sustainable development emphasizes fostering strong, inclusive, and equitable growth. This involves creating wealth and employment opportunities, boosting productivity, and promoting technological innovation and digital capabilities. A stable economic environment is strengthened by supporting entrepreneurial initiatives, which serve as catalysts for innovation and long-term economic vitality. Graduates must receive adequate training to develop the creativity and skills necessary to identify and exploit new business opportunities. Business processes and procedures are carried out using technology. Entrepreneurs must possess digital skills such as networking, communication and collaboration skill so has to be able to withstand the challenges that come with the invention of technology and to ensure that businesses withstand the test of time. The study above shows that entrepreneurship and digital skill has weak but positive significant influence on sustainable economic development. The study concludes that empowering Youth through entrepreneurship and digital skills can promote a sustainable economic development of any nation. This will help equip young people with the skills they needed to succeed in the digital economy and become self-reliant.

## **Recommendations**

1. Management of tertiary institution should focus more on training that involves entrepreneurial and digital skills acquisition by students so as to be self-reliant.
2. Curriculum of Tertiary institution should be reviewed so as to enhance acquisition of entrepreneurial and digital skills
3. Youth should regularly attend lectures, seminars, and symposia about the importance of developing digital and entrepreneurial skills for self-reliance. They would be deterred from the "get rich quick" mentality by this.
4. Prominent and prosperous businesspeople should occasionally be asked to speak to students about the advantages of learning pertinent skills in order to become self-sufficient.
5. It is imperative that young people comprehend who they are because doing so will enable them to recognize and capitalize on their abilities. They will become more focused in life as a result.
6. The government should supply the infrastructure and basic amenities required for entrepreneurs to prosper in the nation.

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